

Horizons

A NEWSLETTER OF WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER // DECEMBER 2022



Infection Preventionist, Tara Favata MS, RN, CIC, shown wearing hand hygiene sensor.

WILKES-BARRE VA DEPLOYS NEW HAND HYGIENE MONITORING SYSTEM

Looking to reduce hospital-acquired infections, the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center implemented a new electronic hand hygiene system called Intelligent Observation.

It's been proven that having clean hands is one of the single most important factors in reducing the risk of cross contamination and infection. Yet worldwide hand hygiene compliance among healthcare workers remains at less than 50%.

Striving to continue to keep a clean work environment, the Wilkes-Barre VA's new hand hygiene system works as follows. An electronic sensor is installed above each patient treatment room, a second sensor is located next to each hand washing sink and a third is worn by the caregiver. Each time the caregiver enters the room and interacts with a patient and then leaves the room, they are prompted by a beep of their transmitter to wash their hands. When the caregiver completes the hand washing task at the monitored hand washing sink, it completes the cycle. Each instance is indiscriminately recorded and made accessible through a dashboard scorecard program.

The successful implementation of the hand hygiene system will reduce the chance of spreading infection through human contact. Keeping our Veterans safe from harmful exposure remains a top priority. All Veteran care areas within the Wilkes-Barre VA are currently meeting the national standard for hand hygiene practices; however, VA employees always strive to do better. By following the Intelligent Observation System, the Wilkes-Barre VA can improve hand hygiene efforts to surpass the national standard and keep our Veterans safe by decreasing the transmission of organisms that can cause healthcare acquired infections.

A Message from the Director



Over the last several months, we've been getting some questions about the Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022, and how it affects our Veterans. The PACT Act is a new law that

expands and extends eligibility for VA health care and benefits to Veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances while serving. The expansion covers Veterans of the Vietnam era as well as Gulf war and Post 9/11 eras.

This landmark legislation removes the need for certain Veterans and their survivors to prove service connection if they are diagnosed with one of 23 specific conditions (<https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>). This reduces the amount of paperwork and the need for exams before being granted access to health care and disability compensation. I encourage any Veteran who thinks they may be eligible for benefits and care under the PACT Act to file a claim.

Many Veterans who previously were ineligible or who never applied for VA health care may be unaware of their eligibility for benefits and services related to potential military exposures. If you or a fellow Veteran fall into this category, it is now easier than ever to apply. Visit us in person at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center or call (877) 928-2621 (press 4); Monday through Friday, 7:00 am to 4:30 pm EST. You can also access the application online at www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/id-form.

Sincerely,



Russell E Lloyd, Director



Ultra clean water is supplied by an in-ward water filtration system that supplies each hemodialysis machine.

Wilkes-Barre VA Dialysis Program

Performing Above Standards for Hemodialysis Treatment

What is Hemodialysis? Hemodialysis is a treatment that is given to patients with end stage renal disease (ESRD), also known as kidney failure. Dialysis is a lifesaving and life-sustaining therapy from which millions of patients have benefited. Dialysis treatment is needed when your kidneys are no longer able to filter and clean the blood the way normal kidneys would. Hemodialysis works by taking blood from your body and cleaning it through a machine to remove toxins before returning to your body.

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center's Hemodialysis Program takes great pride in performing above standard in all defined performance measures for hemodialysis treatment. A goal that the program has met every year since 2014.

"At the heart of the program's success is the dedication and exceptional work ethic of the team that I have the privilege of leading. We would not have a successful program without the contributions of our Nurse Manager Mary Lynn Maker, my physician partner Dr. Young and the dedicated hemodialysis nursing team: Michelle Harrison, Collette Stitt, Lori Sherinsky and Mary Beth Malys"

—Dr. Vera Levchuk, Program Director

Dr. Levchuk has designed a program with a whole health approach when treating Veterans. Each Veteran patient is tended to with great care. As facility Dialysis Program Director, she is ensuring that all dialysis program reporting requirements are met and recorded in the reporting portal monthly. The Wilkes-Barre VA Hemodialysis staff abides by strict guidelines to ensure their Veteran patient's health.

Wilkes-Barre's program success starts with ultra clean water, that is provided by an in-ward water filtration system that supplies each hemodialysis machine. More than any other compound, water is crucial in providing safe and effective hemodialysis. A single 4-hour dialysis treatment requires up to 150L of dialysis "ultra-pure" water. Producing this high-quality water is a multi-step filtration process requiring several levels of processing and meticulous monitoring before it is of adequate quality to be presented to the dialysis machine and the patient's blood.

To undergo dialysis, a patient must first have hemodialysis access. The access allows blood to travel through soft tubes to the dialysis machine. Three different types of accesses can be placed through minor surgery for hemodialysis. They are called a fistula, a graft, and a catheter. A well-functioning vascular access is a mainstay to perform an efficient hemodialysis procedure.

The first choice and what most Wilkes-Barre VA hemodialysis Veterans opt for is a procedure to create an Arteriovenous Fistula. Which is a special connection that is made by joining a vein onto an artery, usually in the arm. This creates a large robust blood vessel that can be needled regularly for use during hemodialysis. It usually takes 6-8 weeks after a successful Arteriovenous Fistula surgery for the blood vessel to mature. Arteriovenous fistula is the preferred access for hemodialysis because it is considered having the lowest risk of complications, the lowest need for interventions, the best long-term patency, and superior patient survival. Wilkes-Barre's Hemodialysis unit met and exceeded the accepted national standards of Arteriovenous Fistula rate by diligently working with each dialysis patient.

Wilkes-Barre's Hemodialysis program employs the highest of standards. Veteran patients are constantly educated, monitored, and referred for timely surgical procedures to maintain a well-functioning Arteriovenous Fistula. But what makes the program so outstanding are the people who work there. Wilkes-Barre's staff brings specialized experience from all different healthcare backgrounds. Which contributes to their total team approach, making their patients feel at ease. Since the staff knows their patients so well, they can often detect other negative health changes both physically and mentally and get them to the proper health care professional to address those concerns.

The program's overall success is derived from every staff member being diligent in their processes. Making sure they dot every I and cross every T, so the patient has the best possible health outcome. This is lifesaving work, and we are proud that we are able to provide such exceptional care right here at the Wilkes-Barre VA.



WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER Employees Helping Veteran Families During the Holidays

The holiday season can be a very stressful time of the year, especially for the Veteran families in need that are raising children. At the Wilkes-Barre VA, our employees recognize these challenges and continue to support our annual Adopt-A-Veteran/Family Holiday Basket Program.

"The program prioritizes Veterans with children. We want to be able to help them provide a great holiday experience for their family, that they may not have had otherwise without our help."

—Alexis Kelly, LCSW, HUD/VASH Coordinator

The VA's homeless team identifies Veteran families that would benefit from the program. We also send a notice out to all our social workers and other providers to identify any Veterans that may be struggling financially to provide for the holidays. Veteran participation is limited to once per lifetime.

Our VA Hospital Services and employees volunteer to provide donations to help fulfill a Veteran family's wish lists. There is usually such an overwhelming response of volunteers that once we have all the families matched with donors, we are then able to open the program up to Veterans with older children and single Veterans.



This holiday season we were able to help 42 Veteran households with 71 children. The total amount of donations collected this season was \$20,820.00. Once all the presents on their wish lists were purchased, we took any leftover donated money and purchased Wal-Mart gift cards for families as well, so they can buy groceries, blankets, home goods, etc.

There are so many heartwarming stories that have come from the Adopt a Veteran program. This year we helped 4 families where the Veteran was the grandparent, raising their grandchildren. We also helped 17 Veterans (7 male and 10 female) raising children on their own. Also, 19 of this year's Veteran households experienced homelessness within the past year.

The annual Adopt-A-Veteran/Family Holiday Basket Program allows VA employees to take an active role in making someone else's holiday season brighter and less stressful. It also underscores the VA's five core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. We are all happy to help.



**New number,
same support.**

Dial 988 then Press 1.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



NEW VETERAN CRISIS LINE DIAL 988, PRESS 1

The Veterans Health Administration has worked with all phone companies to simplify access to the Veterans Crisis Line. Veterans, family members, and friends can now use the new, easy-to-remember number - Dial 988 Press 1 – to directly connect with the Veterans Crisis Line. The previous number, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) then Press 1, will remain active.

If you or a loved one are in crisis, we don't care which number you call, as long as you call!

Veterans Crisis Line responders are ready to listen and help Veterans and their loved ones 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.



Wilkes-Barre VA's Community Living Center Receives **UNEXPECTED SURPRISE**

EIGHT CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

1111 East End Blvd., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
570-824-3521 / 877-928-2621

Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic

3110 Hamilton Blvd., Allentown, PA 18103
610-599-0127

Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

225 Columbia Mall Drive, Bloomsburg, PA 17815
570-316-4116

Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

701 Slate Belt Blvd., Bangor, PA 18013-9341
610-599-0127

Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1537 Elmira Street, Sayre, PA 18840
570-888-6803

Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic

Tobyhanna Army Depot, Bldg. 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
570-615-8341

Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

600 Maple Avenue, Honesdale, PA 18431
570-251-6543

Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1705 Warren Avenue, 3rd Fl., Ste. 304
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-322-4791

Receiving unexpected gifts always comes as a surprise. So, when the Veterans at the Wilkes-Barre VA's Community Living Center (CLC) were informed that they would be receiving a donation from a local railroad club, they were excited.

A few months ago, CLC worker William Roberts sent out a request on social media looking for parts to fix the facility's existing train setup. The message Bill received in return came as a big surprise. Don Karichner, a member of the Back Mountain Railroad Club, spoke to the other club members, and they all decided to donate a full train display to our Veterans at Wilkes-Barre's CLC.

The railroad club started in 2015 and has grown in membership to around 50 members ranging from the tender age of 7 all the way up into their mid-80s.

"We have both male and female members and a lot of them are Veterans. The reason we are called a railroad club as opposed to a model railroad club is because some of our members are primarily interested in real trains, one to ones. A lot of us

like the railroad history and what they did to help build this country. We even have some retired railroad engineers in the club."

—Ray Mancke- Back Mountain Railroad Club, President

The railroad club is a very community minded organization, and the club president feels that it's not going to be the only layout that they create and donate. They are planning to try to do something like this every year or so, depending on the length of time it takes to build. There were quite a few members along the way that contributed to building the 4ft x 7ft display, but the primary designer and builder of the display was club member and Navy Veteran John Marshall. This display took a little over a year and three months to build.

Donations like this give Veterans a chance to socialize and build comradery while giving them a chance to enjoy an active hobby many have had since their childhood. The hours of enjoyment this donation brings are so valuable for the mental health and well-being of our Veterans. Thank You Back Mountain Railroad club for your generosity!

Call Center

1-877-928-2621

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